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POSITIONING OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITY BUSINESS PROGRAMS –
GUELPH-HUMBER

STEPHANIE DANTAS - #1129

A Project carried out under the supervision of:
Professor Elizabete Cardoso

Supervisor: George Bragues,
University of Guelph-Humber Vice Pro-Vost

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Abstract

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Universities need a unique and differentiated positioning to stand out and continue to grow in the Ontario Higher Education marketplace. The University of Guelph-Humber's business program does not currently have a clear positioning strategy, which is necessary to increase enrolment and ultimately profits. In essence, it has yet to find the one unique word that is synonymous with the University of Guelph-Humber. With the use of qualitative and quantitative research, this thesis will present a better understanding of the decision-making process when applying to a business program and to propose a positioning strategy for Guelph-Humber that is credible, compelling and distinctive.

Keywords: Positioning, Ontario, Business Program

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to develop a positioning strategy for the University of Guelph-Humber's Business Program. The Vice Pro-Vost at Guelph-Humber (GH) awarded an internship to research and establish where GH stands in the competitive market landscape. This report will establish what students, parents and faculty value and what factors specific to GH should be focused on, in terms of marketing spend and effectiveness. This proposed positioning strategy will help GH successfully market itself.

GH is a partnership between the University of Guelph and Humber College. It was established in 2002 and it is located on the Humber College North Campus in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The school offers seven regular four year academic programs, each of which grant both a university honours degree and a college diploma.

The business program at GH offers students both a theoretical approach through traditional lecture style learning and a practical hands-on approach through real scenario based case studies and projects in business. Students who complete the business program at GH graduate with a bachelor of business administration from the University of Guelph along with the practical skills of a Humber College Diploma in Business Administration with a specialization in a specific field (marketing, finance, etc.).

The primary target for GH are senior high school students who have a GPA (grade point average) of above 70% and want to attend a business program in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

The eminent problem with GH is that it is a relatively new school in a market with many well-established and reputable universities. It has not yet made a name for itself, thus attracting young, talented individuals is very difficult with a vast number of competitors. GH needs to represent a new and distinctive space in the Ontario

University market to succeed.

Literature Review

The literature regarding the decision of whether or not to pursue higher education is vast, but of little relevance to this paper since we are examining the decision-making processes of applying to specific higher-education institutions in Canada. There is a substantial amount of work examining the college decision-making process among American students, exemplified by the papers contained in Hoxby (2004) and summarized by Cabrera and La Nasa (2000). The main topic of this literature is the role played by personal attributes, including parental background, socio-economic status, etc.. For those choosing to attend college, the next choice is one made between duration and type of colleges: 2-year versus 4-year, public versus private. This is not a specifically relevant classification for Ontario universities, which are all public and offer primarily 4-year degrees. High school graduates in the province who do not want to dedicate so much time to higher-education or prefer more job-related skilled programs, normally apply to the province's system of community colleges. The classification of Ontario schools also does not allow us to explore the role of the characteristics of individual institutions in attracting students.

Due to the lack of data availability, most articles on the decision-making process of higher-education school choices have used institution-level data on total applications to determine the effect of school attributes. Monks and Ehrenberg (1999) conclude the reactions of applicants to fluctuations in the college rankings of 30 top-ranked, private universities by observing admission outcomes and aid-adjusted tuition. A decline in an institution's ranking results in a better admit rate, a worse graduation rate (signifying a

class of lower quality), and decreases in net tuition. Mueller and Rockerbie (2002) are also focused on the role of national rankings rather than wider institutional characteristics and use applications to institutions in Ontario to evaluate the impact of the rankings. They find that an improvement in a university's ranking generally increases enrolment.

Brand Image in Higher Education

In Canada, students looking to pursue a higher education, rank competing options with the help of Maclean's University Rankings and the Globe & Mail University Report Card (Black, 2010). It has been long proven that university applicants perceive a school's reputation with remarkable consistency across the years as stated by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Commonly, universities that are older, larger, or closer in geographic proximity to the respondent are rated more highly (UCAS). However, broad claims of academic excellence only earn an undifferentiated and average reputation, and a more focused distinctive positioning is the real foundation for a successful national profile and reputation. Universities that have a focused position experience a 'halo effect' over time that raises credibility and reputation because only one brand can occupy that position in the minds of consumers (Ries and Trout, 1981) and while quality is important, brands are not built by quality alone (Ries 2002).

Decision Making Process

Literature on institutional strategy and positioning by Jim Black 2010 states that students are overwhelmed with thousands of schools and an overload of information therefore their mental map for any given school becomes simplistic. Ultimately, positioning amounts to owning one word in the prospect's mind (ex. University of

Toronto equals excellence). For applicants, how a college or university differs from other institutions is much more important than all the things the institutions have in common. Successful institutional strategy is found in the overlap between student needs and institutional strengths, where it is distinct from competing institutions' positions (Steele, 2008). Thus to be successful, GH's position needs to be designed with Jim Black's theory of the "three C's" of branding: simultaneously Credible, Compelling, and Competitively Distinct. The "three C's" align with the three intersecting circles of corporate strategy: company capabilities, customer needs, and competitor offerings (Collis & Rukstad, 2008). In essence, GH needs to find the one word that it is synonymous within all prospective students' minds to be credible, compelling and competitively distinct from its top competitors in the province of Ontario.

Methodology

Stage 1 – First & Secondary Data

The initial stage of the project was to gather primary and secondary data using public, online and print resources. This stage was essential to identify competing schools offering the same type of program in the same geographic area with the same target audience. The sources used were the top 5 online references used when researching Ontario Universities:

1. Globe and Mail 2013 University Report Card
2. Macleans 2013 University Rankings
3. Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) website
4. einfo.ca (University Guide) website
5. Council of Ontario University (CUDO) website

Once the preliminary data collection was completed, a list of 16 initial competitive

benchmarks was populated. Secondary data research was then collected on these 16 benchmarks through individual school websites to gather detailed information on each business program and compare their similarities and differences.

Stage 2 – Qualitative Research

The second stage was to gather qualitative research to identify which of the 16 Ontario Universities were the main competitors of GH and to better understand the decision making process and what factors influence it.

Qualitative research is used on a small number of subjects that are (usually) not randomly selected, so as to obtain their perspective on the general theme (Brown & Suter, 2011). As the information gathered, certain hypotheses can be formulated and later tested through quantitative research (Brown & Suter, 2011).

Interviewees (or subjects) were selected at random and were required to answer a pre-questionnaire to filter them into 5 targets (See Appendix I Interview Guide):

- 1-High School Counsellors
- 2- Students currently enrolled in a University Business Program in Ontario
- 3- Students enrolled at GH's Business Program
- 4- Senior High School Students looking to pursue a Business Degree in Ontario
- 5-Parents of Students in or considering a Business Program

High school counsellors were chosen to help identify the main competitors for GH as they are the ones guiding students through the decision process and are not biased to any particular school. During the in-depth interviews, they were asked to explain how they are able to properly recommend the best school for each student and to describe how and why they would advise a student interested in a business program on one school versus another.

The second segment was asked to converse about why they decided to enrol in their current school and what other schools they applied to and why. In this in-depth interview, the focus was on obtaining underlying subconscious brand image information including perceptions, explanations and/or emotions.

The third segment's interview focused on GH and its most compelling features. Respondents were asked to explain why they chose to attend GH's business program, and what other schools they applied to, along with the most important/appealing factors when making their decision.

The fourth segment interview with high school students encouraged them to talk about their decision making process. Students were asked to explain what schools they were considering and why. The interview will identify some of the main characteristics about schools that are intriguing students to enrol and apply.

The last segment with the individual parent in-depth interviews was to gain any insight on their influence and their perceptions of the brand image of Ontario Business Programs.

These interviews were used to collect qualitative data and information that would not be identifiable with the use of a simple questionnaire or survey. The in-depth interviews gave a much better understanding of the perceptions and preconceived views these segments had on higher education institutions in Ontario.

Stage 3 – Quantitative Research

The final stage of the project was to gather quantitative research using a questionnaire with 9 questions (See Appendix II). The goal of this quantitative research was to collect over 120 respondents, namely over 30 respondents in each of the following targets:

- Parent of Student in High School or University Business Program

- Graduates of a Business Program
- Students in High School pursuing higher education in business

The questionnaire focused on the 4 direct competitors of GH's business program which consist of the top 3 University business programs offered in the GTA (University of Toronto, York University, and Ryerson University) and the top College offering a business degree right next door to GH (Humber College). This short list of competitors was confirmed through interviews with high school guidance counsellors, alumni from GH and current GH students.

The first part of the questionnaire was to distinguish what demographic segment the respondent was part of and also used as a filter to eliminate any respondents that did not fit the target. The rest of the questionnaire was structured to define the 'three C's' as stated by Jim Black in *Delivering on the Brand Promise: Credibility, Competitively Distinctive and Compelling*. Question number 5 & 6 required respondents to rank GH and its 4 competitors amongst the most frequently mentioned topics in the decision making process (collected during the in-depth interviews). This ranking will demonstrate the competitively distinct features of each school. Question number 7 of the questionnaire concludes the most compelling features when deciding on a higher education in business which will aid in defining GH's positioning strategy. Question number 9 asked respondents to identify the most prominent features that GH offers which will give them credibility. The collected data in this quantitative research step and analysis were integral in defining GH's positioning in the market and the key to differentiating it to be truly successful in Ontario.

Results

Stage 1 – First and Secondary Data

The Globe and Mail Newspaper and Maclean's Magazine do an annual Canadian

University Report, which are valuable resources for students planning to enrol in

University and also a reference point for top employers. The University of GH is not

listed in these reports and thus discourages many students from applying. (See

Appendix III for key reporting's from 2013)

Stage 2 – Qualitative Research

The qualitative research identified the 4 main competitors of GH and gave a clear

understanding of the decision making process and the influencing factors.

1-High School Counsellors

1. The guidance counsellors at high schools start their advising sessions by asking students primarily where they want to study; if it is in and around their home city or away:

“Well the first question I always have to ask is if they want to stay in Toronto or go away because that really eliminates a lot of schools and it also usually is the case with a lot of our students that they want to stay in the city.” (Guidance Counsellors, St. Joseph's College, 12 years experience)

2. The next thing counsellors require to properly and effectively advise students on which schools to consider is what degree or specialization they wish to pursue. After an in-depth analysis of the students' grades and the admission requirements, they are then fully capable of presenting students with their best options. Admission requirements are a key insight as they can help determine

where students can and cannot go based on their grades:

“Most students are very familiar with the top ranked schools like U of T (University of Toronto) Rotman School of Business, Ryerson and Schulich School of Business (York University Program) but the hard truth is that we need to be realistic and only top of the class students should be applying as the admission requirements are high and if the grades are no where near they should not waste their time.” (Student Services Advisor, Thomas Merton Secondary School, 7 years experience)

“...if a student asked me about a business school in Toronto I would recommend University of Toronto, Ryerson and York University.” (Guidance Counsellor at St.Mary’s Catholic School, 5 years experience)

In the end, all research in this segment led to the aforementioned 4 schools as the direct competitors of GH and those that it should differentiate itself from to make its own place in the market for business programs in the GTA.

2- Students currently enrolled in a University Business Program in Ontario

The in-depth interviews conducted with students in other University Business Programs proved that reputation was the highest and most important topic mentioned and noted.

All of the students in this target mentioned reputation as being a big part of their decision making process.

“I chose this school because it is reputable and it is recognized in the job market” (2nd Student at University of Toronto - Mississauga).

Another noteworthy key insight with the students at other University Business Programs was location:

“I could not afford to go away from home so I chose a school that was easily accessible with public transit.” (4th year York University Business Student).

Program specifics offered by other schools, whether providing a certain path or certain course offering was the final reoccurring topic in these interviews.

“Deciding my major in second year was much more appealing than having to choose a major field right away. The variety of courses they offered was also a reason why it was more interesting to me than the other schools. For example retail management is an interesting topic and Ryerson made it clear that they offered these kinds of unique courses.” (3rd year Student enrolled in business at Ryerson University).

3- Students enrolled at GH’s Business Program

The key insight taken from the interview with students currently enrolled at GH were the most compelling factors GH offered to its current students. All in-depth interviews with GH students proved that they valued the ability to graduate in 4 years with a business degree and a college diploma above all as it is specific to GH and not offered by any other institution in Ontario.

“One of the main reasons I was intrigued by GH was because I was able to get a degree and a specialized diploma in 4 years. I feel like this is important because a lot of people go to college after university to specialize in a certain area.” (3rd year Student enrolled in business at GH)

“The ability to get a degree and diploma in just 4 years was really what made me want to go to GH. I knew I wanted to go to University but I really valued having hands-on learning. The professors at GH helped me gain both which

made it a balanced program. I feel that many top schools focus solely on books and lectures and personally do not think that is what it's all about. Once you get into the real world you need to be able to communicate effectively and deal with many issues you don't always learn in your lectures and from your textbooks."

(4th year Student enrolled in business, specializing in finance at GH)

4- Senior High School Students looking to pursue a Business Degree in Ontario

The interviews with High School Students proved two key insights as predominant decision-making factors. The first insight mentioned by all was program offerings and course specifics.

"The University of Ryerson offers the Real Estate Management program which is the field I hope to work in and they are the only ones in Toronto that offer it."

(Grade 12 Student at Lakeview Secondary School)

"York is my number one choice because they offer the international business degree with a term exchange program abroad. I am really interested in travelling and experiencing international cultures."

(Grade 12 student at St. Joseph's College School)

The second insight mentioned in more than 4 of the in-depth interviews was reputation/ranking.

"U of T is my top choice because it's the best school in Toronto and it would make my parents proud too because it is highly ranked in the ranking system."

(Grade 12 Student at Saint Francis Xavier Secondary School)

5-Parents of Students in or considering a Business Program

Parents with students in university had several different opinions the most common being location with an importance on staying close to home, reputation and safety.

“It would be ideal if my daughter got into Ryerson because it is not far from home and she would only need to take one subway to school. Having her close to home is more comforting to me and also less expensive.” (56 year old Mother of a grade 11 student at Loretto College)

“If it was up to me he would be going to York Schulich I have heard it is the best business school in Toronto but he doesn’t have the grades for that just yet.” (48 year old Father of a grade 12 student at Pocock Secondary School)

“I really am just happy if my child attends a University rather than college. I feel like she will be able to get a better and higher paying job after graduation and that she will learn and be more challenged at a University rather than College.” (55 year old Mother of a grade 12 student at Unionville High School)

“With the previous issues that we have had in the news my main concern and only one with my daughter in University is a safe campus.” (43 year old Mother of a grade 12 student at Bramalea Secondary School)

The qualitative research was crucial in identifying the 4 main competitors of GH, providing a clear understanding of the decision making process and the underlying subconscious reasons why some school characteristics were more appealing than others.

Stage 4 – Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is the best way to objectively establish and measure existing brand perceptions, and help to define the credible “brand footprint” for an institution in the near future (Black, 2010). The analysis of the quantitative research was integral in defining GH’s credible, competitively distinct and compelling positioning in the market.

Question number 9 in the research survey conducted (See Appendix II) asked the different segments to point out the perceived top features of GH to see what would be credible as a positioning. The number 1 feature of GH according to the quantitative results is its learning style which combines practical hands on and theoretical learning. The second best feature of GH was the scholarships available to students. Overall, 67% of respondents included the learning style as one of the top features of GH and 53% included scholarships available.

Table 1 – Demonstrating the percentage of 117 respondents that ranked the top 2 features of GH

Ranking	Practical & Theoretical Learning Style	Scholarships Available
#1	32%	12%
#2	20%	31%
#3	15%	10%
Total	67%	53%

So it is clear and conclusive through our results that the credible positioning of GH is first and foremost the learning style offered with the University of Guelph's theoretical approach combined with the Humber College hands-on learning style and secondly the Scholarships available to help students pay for their education.

GH's brand position also needs to be competitively distinct from the perceived positions of its main competitor institutions. It is not effective when institutions spend their marketing budgets on identical brand positions. Thus, question number 5 of the questionnaire asked respondents to rank each of the main competitors and GH from 1-5 (1 being the lowest 5 the highest) in terms of several major factors in the decision making process to identify its distinctive feature. The first and most prominent element was academic excellence/reputation where the University of Toronto was top rated by 41.96% of respondents followed by York University second, Ryerson in third then GH

and lastly Humber College.

Table 2 – Demonstrating the percentage of 143 respondents that ranked the schools on Academic Excellence/Reputation

	Top Ranked (5-4)	Lowest Ranked (1-2)
University of Toronto	64%	17%
York University	52%	22%
Ryerson University	38%	29%
University of Guelph-Humber	30%	45%
Humber College	24%	55%

The University of Toronto is 186 years old and has been clearly made the top reputable school in Ontario in terms of research, faculty and alumni. Due to the fact that GH is a relatively new and young school it does not rank high on academic excellence. This also has to do with the fact that the admission requirements are lower then that of University of Toronto and it is associated with Humber College which is lowest ranked on academic excellence, as it is perceived as being a lower form of education when compared to university standards. Therefore question number 5 of the questionnaire made it clear that academic excellence is not a distinctive factor for GH.

The second feature respondents were asked to rank was location. The school with the #1 ranked location was Ryerson closely followed by the University of Toronto then York, GH and Humber.

Table 3 – Demonstrating the percentage of 143 respondents that ranked the schools on Location

	Top Ranked (5-4)	Lowest Ranked (1-2)
University of Toronto	54%	27%
Ryerson University	48%	28%
York University	34%	36%
Humber College	34%	47%
University of Guelph-Humber	29%	48%

Ryerson is considered to be in the heart of the downtown core near the city centre of Dundas Square, the busiest area of Toronto. University of Toronto followed in close second as it is also in the heart of downtown but is widely dispersed in many different buildings, which sometimes can be inconvenient for students. In sum, location did not have very conclusive results as it is perceived differently by many stakeholders - some people love the downtown core hustle and bustle and others prefer to be out closer to the suburbs to avoid traffic and parking issues. Location is not a competitively distinct asset of GH even though it is appealing to several people in and around the area. The third feature respondents were asked to rank was tuition cost where Humber College was top ranked in terms of being the least expensive followed by GH.

Table 4 – Demonstrating the percentage of 143 respondents that ranked the schools on Tuition

	Top Ranked (5-4)	Lowest Ranked (1-2)
Humber College	57%	27%
University of Guelph-Humber	46%	27%
Ryerson University	31%	37%
University of Toronto	30%	52%
York University	22%	48%

It is known by most stakeholders that college is a lot less expensive to attend when compared to university. The second ranked was GH with 46% (top ranked) due to the fact that it is associated with Humber and it has used its scholarship strategy to compel many students to attend. Ryerson ranked 3rd, followed by York and lastly University of Toronto. These results are closely related to reputation because a school considered to have a higher academic excellence/reputation usually has increased tuition fees. This is also proven in the Globe and Mail annual University Report as University of Toronto

has the highest average tuition followed by York and Ryerson. Therefore, GH is competitively distinct in tuition costs when compared to the other three universities. In the next feature, respondents were requested to rank the mix of practical and theoretical learning style at each school. In this section GH came out on top.

Table 5 – Demonstrating the percentage of 143 respondents that ranked the schools on Practical (hands-on) and Theoretical Learning Style

	Top Ranked (5-4)	Lowest Ranked (1-2)
University of Guelph-Humber	64%	20%
Humber College	51%	34%
York University	31%	36%
Ryerson University	31%	40%
University of Toronto	29%	48%

This is the only category where over 64% of respondents gave GH the number one rank. GH was followed in this category by Humber College, which is perceived as mostly practical in it's approach, specific skills and trades. The combination of University of Guelph and Humber College is without a doubt the distinct feature GH should focus on in their positioning strategy. GH has the degree and specialized diploma to give students a well-rounded education and to effectively prepare them for the competitive job market and this is something other universities just cannot compete with.

Respondents were also asked to rank the schools in terms of the facilities they offer. University of Toronto and York University came out on top with majority of respondents selecting one or the other.

Table 6 – Demonstrating the percentage of 143 respondents that ranked the schools on Facilities

	Top Ranked (5-4)	Lowest Ranked (1-2)
University of Toronto	57%	27%
York University	50%	24%
Humber College	43%	36%
Ryerson University	30%	33%

University of Guelph-Humber	22%	53%
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Both University of Toronto and York have very large campuses with many services and facilities. Facilities include libraries, research centre, career centre, book store, computer services, gym/fitness center access to health services etc. Humber College followed the top two in this category as it also offers student many facilities and has a large campus. GH and Ryerson fell behind in this category due to smaller scale campuses and both are relatively newer schools.

When respondents were asked to rank schools on class sizes, GH was ranked the highest and University of Toronto the lowest. GH focuses on having more intimate classes with higher student teacher interaction and this is another competitively distinctive factor that sets it apart.

Table 7 – Demonstrating the percentage of 143 respondents that ranked the schools on Class Sizes

	Top Ranked (5-4)	Lowest Ranked (1-2)
University of Toronto	27%	53%
York University	27%	46%
Humber College	48%	29%
Ryerson University	35%	33%
University of Guelph-Humber	55%	27%

The last questions respondents were asked was regarding program and course specifics. This includes the variety of course offerings and the ability to choose specializations or to generalize. Humber came out on top as it is perceived to offer a much larger number of programs and specializations when compared to universities. Ryerson followed closely with the largest Business Program in Canada (Globe and Mail Report 2013), then York, University of Toronto and lastly GH.

Table 8 – Demonstrating the percentage of 143 respondents that ranked the schools on Program/Course Specifics

	Top Ranked (5-4)	Lowest Ranked (1-2)
Humber College	48%	35%
Ryerson University	46%	30%
York University	42%	31%
University of Toronto	38%	38%
University of Guelph-Humber	33%	43%

The quantitative research was effective in pinpointing the 3 competitively distinctive features of GH which can be leveraged to its benefit in a successful campaign:

1. Tuition Cost/Scholarships available
2. Practical and Theoretical Learning
3. Small Class Sizes

With the results of the questionnaire, GH has a couple features in which it can be considered to be credible and competitively distinct although to complete the “three C’s” the position needs to be compelling to be most effective. The positioning of GH must be compelling not only for the primary target (prospective undergraduate students), but also for graduate students, faculty and staff, prospective faculty and alumni. To be compelling, all stakeholders need to be able to relate to the strategic positioning. “If the strategic positioning process has been sufficiently inclusive and consultative, all stakeholders will be engaged in the process of uncovering the core of the institution’s mission and vision.” (Black, 2010). The language, visuals and terms that are most compelling and memorable for the target market also need to be used. “Market research can measure the appeal and impact of the most compelling brand promises, and help identify the language that can clearly communicate the concepts to various audiences.”(Black, 2010). The implementation of having a compelling

positioning is to consider what the target market is looking for and also to create a niche. The key is to focus the mission and marketing messages on a single word or concept rather than trying to “own” six or eight different concepts simultaneously (Black, 2010). The final question of the survey was integral to discovering what is important to the target market and thus the best way to relate to them with a compelling positioning in line with what they want. Respondents were asked to identify the top factors they considered when choosing a business program and results showed that academic excellence was the main deciding factor (46% of respondents said this was the most important factor).

Table 9 – Demonstrating percentage of the 144 respondents that chose the following as the top three factors when deciding on a Business Program

Ranking of importance	Factor	% Of Total Respondents
#1	Academic Excellence	72%
#2	Location	65%
#3	Facilities	35%

Consequently, to be compelling and relevant in the eyes of our stakeholders, academic excellence cannot be forgotten and GH needs to show that it is in fact in the rankings when it comes to this factor.

Conclusion & Recommendation

In conclusion, the main takeaways from both the qualitative and quantitative results are that:

- The 4 main competitors of GH are: University of Toronto, York University, Ryerson University and Humber College
- The most credible features of GH are: the Learning Style offered with the University of Guelph’s theoretical approach combined with the Humber College

hands-on learning style and secondly the Scholarships available to help students pay for their education

- The most competitively distinct features of GH are:

1. Practical and Theoretical Learning
2. Tuition Cost/Scholarships available
3. Small Class Sizes

- The most compelling factor for all stakeholders is: academic excellence

Most positioning programs are nothing more or less than a search for the obvious and the essence of positioning is sacrifice (Ries & Trout, 1981). In other words, “the most important aspect of a brand is its single-mindedness” (Ries, 2002). The goal of a strategic positioning plan for an institution like GH is not to create an illusionary or unrealistic perception, but to eliminate the noise and focus on a concept – “a grand oversimplification” (Black, 2010). In order for a school in a dense market to stand out and for the target market (high school seniors) to be aware top of mind, they need to communicate in the most effective way with the most distinctive, credible and compelling message. The next step for GH would be to establish their brand position and make it comprehensible to high school seniors, and express it in terms high school seniors will find attention-getting and appealing. If GH does not communicate its brand position with the “three C’s” or if it tries to be a “multiversity” it will ultimately stand for nothing in the minds of the stakeholders. “And if a college or university abdicates responsibility to define and communicate its essence, the marketplace will fill that information vacuum by inventing a position for the institution, through rankings, word of mouth, gossip, perceptions, and misperceptions.” (Black, 2010).

The way that GH should position itself in this competitive market is to leverage the combination of the most important factor to students – academic excellence and its competitively distinct and credible factor of practical and theoretical learning. This requires the use of the University of Guelph’s reputation to boost people’s perception of GH and the use of Humber College to boost the hands on learning style that sets it apart. The most important part of standing out in this dense market space with a lot of distinguished competitors that rank significantly higher in many of the main factors is to establish a niche and create demand for it. (See Positioning Map Appendix IV)

Referencing Keller Positioning Model Customer Based Brand Equity, there are 4 steps to a positioning strategy:

1. Establish the target market – prospective students in high school with above 70% average, looking to attend a school that will challenge but also allow them to gain experience (hands-on) and extra-curricular activities
2. Nature of Competition – taking into account that location is a prime factor in decision making the competitors are the schools offering a business degree within a 50km radius (within the GTA)
 - a. University of Toronto
 - b. York
 - c. Ryerson
 - d. Humber
3. Points of Difference – Offering a business degree with an accredited University ranked as one of the top in Canada along with a diploma from Humber College (Academic Excellence + Practical Learning).
4. Points of Parity

- a. Category points of parity include: accredited programs, a safe campus environment, reasonable tuition prices, and generally satisfied students
- b. Competitive points of parity – academic excellence reputation

Positioning statement:

“For High School students with 70% average or higher[Target] Guelph-Humber is a University offering an accredited degree, a small campus, scholarships and reasonable tuition prices [Points of Parity] which provides students with the practical and theoretical knowledge to prosper in future careers [Points of Difference] because of the degree offered by the University of Guelph combined with the diploma offered by Humber College.[Reason to believe]”

The point of difference is critical in the Keller Model in that it has to have desirability criteria: Relevant, distinctive and credible. GH has proven to have a perceived mixed learning style and this is both distinctive and credible and furthermore it becomes relevant in terms of academic excellence with the rankings of the University of Guelph which needs to be made known.

Positioning should be something that you do not change often and you can adhere to for many years. Applicants perceive most Canadian institutions as satisfactory on all fifty factors, but when making final choices from their consideration set, applicants distinguish between institutions in five key areas: academic quality, outcomes, campus experience, nurturing environment, and financial considerations (Steele, 2008). To simplify the complexity of a life-changing decision, applicants generally ascribe each institution to a strength, which is why the proposed positioning map (Appendix IV) has axis of practical and theoretical learning and academic excellence. The four quadrants of the positioning map demonstrate how the top competitors are positioned in the

current marketplace. It is clear in this diagram that GH has the opportunity to exploit the upper left quadrant having a high reputation for academic quality with the degree from Guelph and a great student experience due to the learning style combination. The focal point for GH is the learning style as the academic excellence is a point of parity that will need to be made clear but is not the point of difference in the higher education landscape. This focal point will guide the institutional vision and strategic plan. Marketing emphasis needs to be channeled to ensure that the positioning focus truly outshines all other institutions within the scope of its marketplace and GH will then become truly successful in Ontario.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Positioning Ontario Business Universities In-Depth Interview Guide

Sample

6 senior high school students looking to pursue a business degree
6 university students (Currently enrolled in a business program in Ontario)
6 students currently enrolled at Guelph-Humber in the Business Program
6 high school guidance counsellors in Ontario
6 parents of students going into a business program in Ontario

Total 30

Consent

'Hi my name is Stephanie Dantas I am a student at Universidade Nova de Lisboa. I am conducting research for my thesis on the Positioning of Ontario Universities. Can I ask you a few questions and can I have your consent to record this interview?'

Pre-Questionnaire:

Current university students and GH students

Filters:

- Are you in a business program?
 - a. If yes, continue interview.
 - i. Which field are you specializing in if any and what year are you in?
 - b. If no, end interview.

Senior high school students

Filters:

- What kind of degree are you looking to pursue in high-education?
 - a. If business, continue with filters
 - a. Are you considering schools in Ontario?
 - i. If yes, this person is a candidate
 - b. If no, end interview
 - b. If not business, end interview.

Parents of Students going into business

Filters:

- Are you a parent of a child in high school who is applying to a business degree in Ontario?
 - a. If yes, this person is a candidate.
 - b. If no, end interview.

Open Questions to start the in-depth interview:

Students in University Business program (not GH):

Can you tell me about how you decided which school to attend?

- What were your top 3 schools when applying? Why?
- What were the most important factors in making your decision?
- What were the most appealing offers and why?

Students enrolled in the University of Guelph-Humber Business Program:

Can you tell me about how you decided which school to attend?

- What were your top 3 schools when applying? Why?
- What were the most important factors in making your decision?
- What were the most appealing offers and why?

Senior High School Students going in Business

Can you tell me about what schools you are considering to apply to?

- What are the top 3 and why?
- What are the most important factors?
- What are the most appealing offers and why?

High School Counsellor:

Can you tell me about how you help students to decide which school to apply to?

- If I came into your office as a student and I asked you to advise me what business program I should apply to which would be the top schools you would recommend?
- How do you help students in the decision making process?

Parents:

Can you tell me about what school you would like your child to go to and why?

- What are the top 3 schools in their perception
- What are the most important factors of the business program or school
- What are the most appealing things about the school for a parent
- How much influence they have on their children decision making

Appendix II

School	Pro	Con	Reputation with employers grade	Macleans Ranking
University of Guelph	Strong international development program	Large first-year classes	<i>A-</i>	#4
Ryerson University	Better performance on NSSE* than York and UofT*	Polytechnic roots lessen academic prestige, largest undergraduate business school in	<i>A-</i>	#12
University of Toronto	Diverse student body, ranked as top university in the world, obvious choice for ambitious student wanting to study among heavy-hitters	Unsupportive learning environment, highest tuition, scored dead last in the country NSSE for 'active and collaborative learning' and similarly low for 'creative a supportive campus environment'.	<i>A</i>	#3
York University	Students' dedication to social justice, good culture highly-rated programs in business	Uninspiring setting, long commute to campus	<i>C</i>	#8

*NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement)

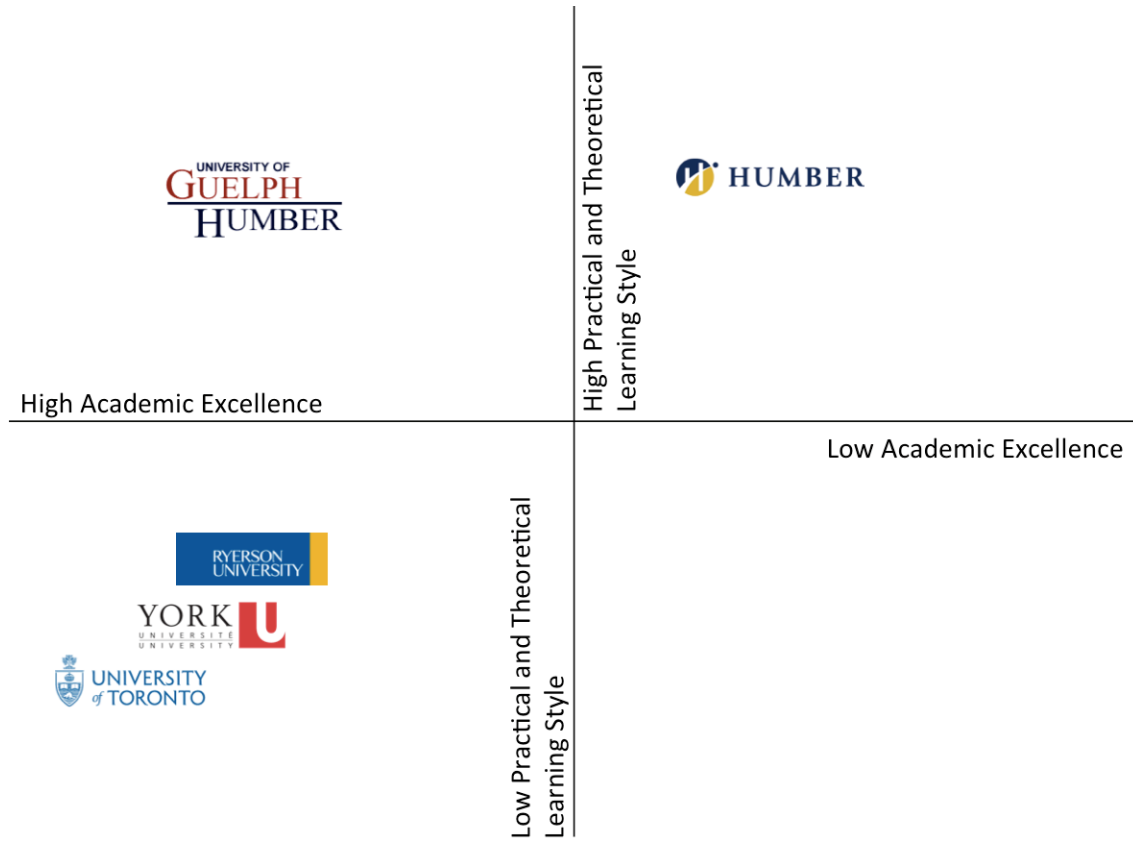
*UofT (University of Toronto)

Appendix III

Questionnaire & Analysis - All Data (attached .pdf document)

Appendix IV

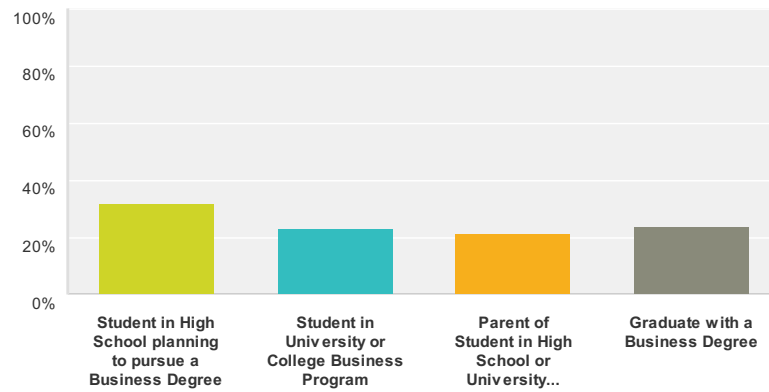
Positioning Grid



Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q1 Please specify which type of respondent you are:

Answered: 146 Skipped: 2

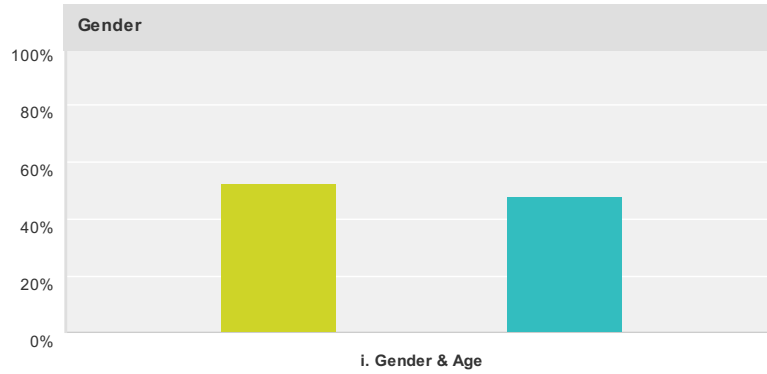


Answer Choices	Responses	
Student in High School planning to pursue a Business Degree	31.51%	46
Student in University or College Business Program	23.29%	34
Parent of Student in High School or University Business Program	21.23%	31
Graduate with a Business Degree	23.97%	35
Total		146

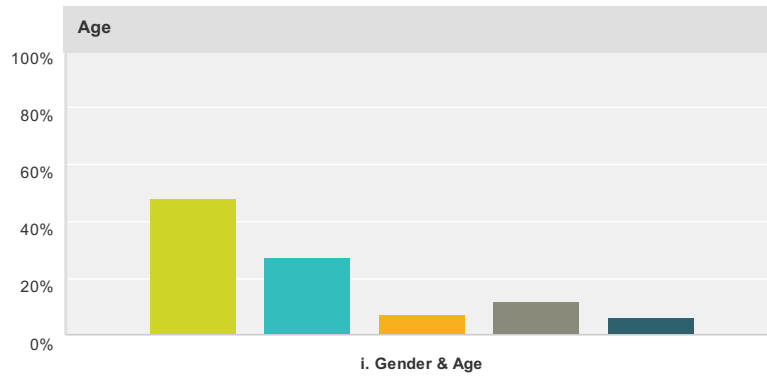
Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q2 What is your

Answered: 148 Skipped: 0



Male Female



18-24 24-34 35-44 45-54 55+

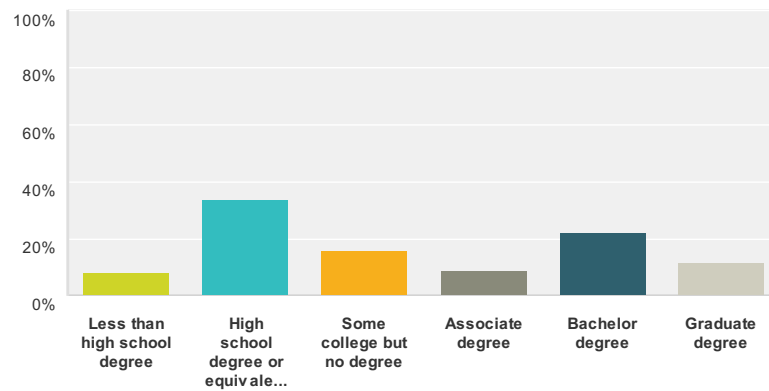
Gender						
	Male		Female		Total	
i. Gender & Age	52.03% 77		47.97% 71		148	

Age						
	18-24	24-34	35-44	45-54	55+	Total
i. Gender & Age	47.97% 71	27.03% 40	7.43% 11	11.49% 17	6.08% 9	148

Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q3 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Answered: 148 Skipped: 0

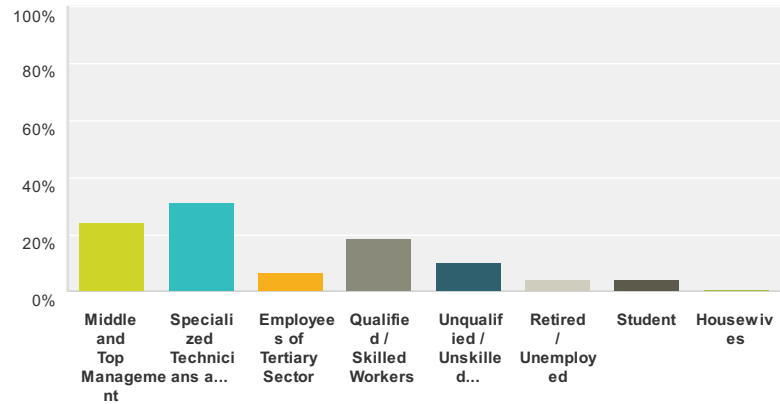


Answer Choices	Responses	
Less than high school degree	8.11%	12
High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	33.78%	50
Some college but no degree	15.54%	23
Associate degree	8.78%	13
Bachelor degree	22.30%	33
Graduate degree	11.49%	17
Total		148

Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q4 What is the current occupation of the highest earning member in your household?

Answered: 148 Skipped: 0

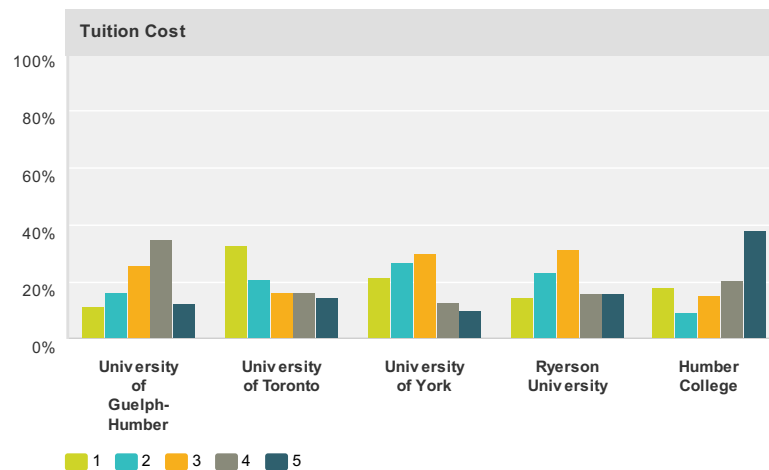
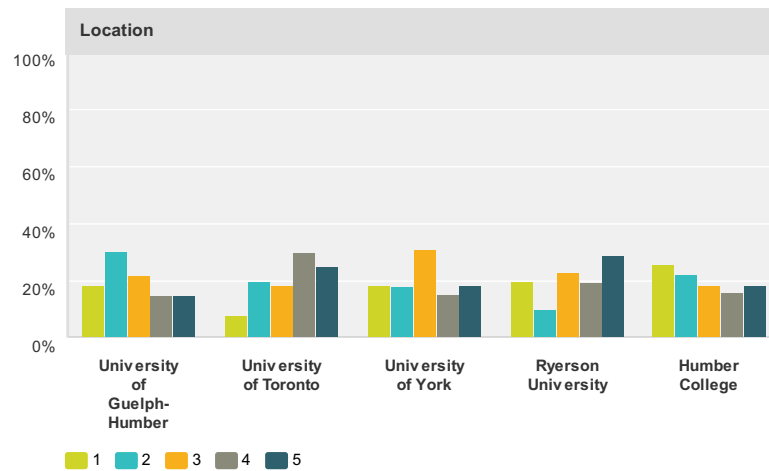
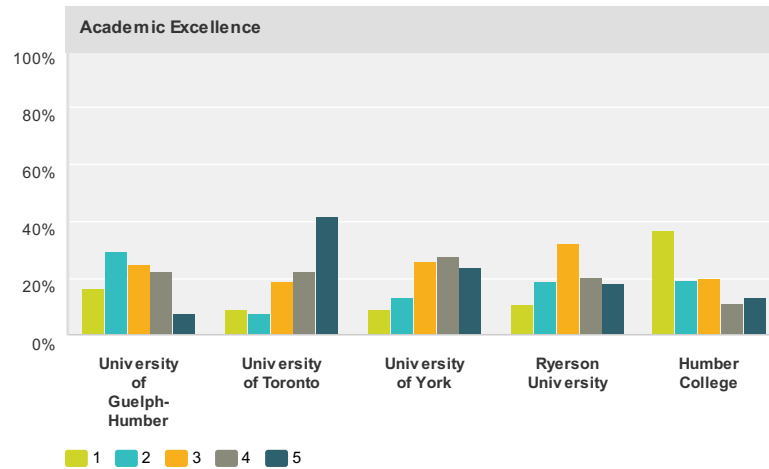


Answer Choices	Responses	
Middle and Top Management	24.32%	36
Specialized Technicians and Small Business Owners	31.08%	46
Employees of Tertiary Sector	6.76%	10
Qualified / Skilled Workers	18.92%	28
Unqualified / Unskilled Workers	10.14%	15
Retired / Unemployed	4.05%	6
Student	4.05%	6
Housewives	0.68%	1
Total		148

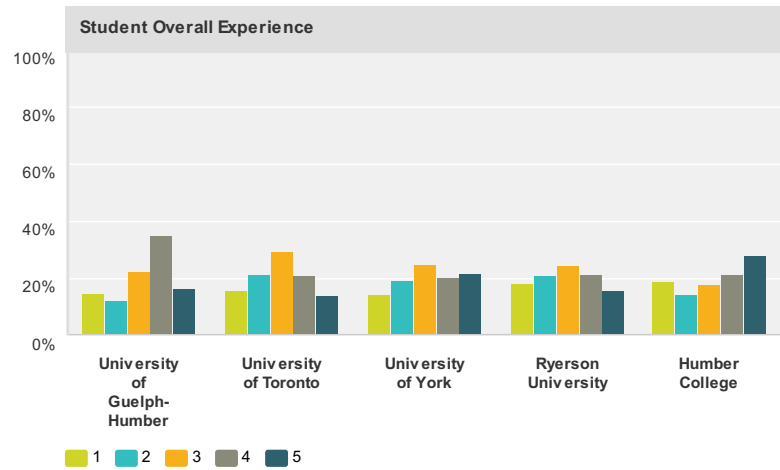
Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q5 Rank these schools on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest 5 the highest) in terms of:

Answered: 144 Skipped: 4



Positioning of Ontario Universities

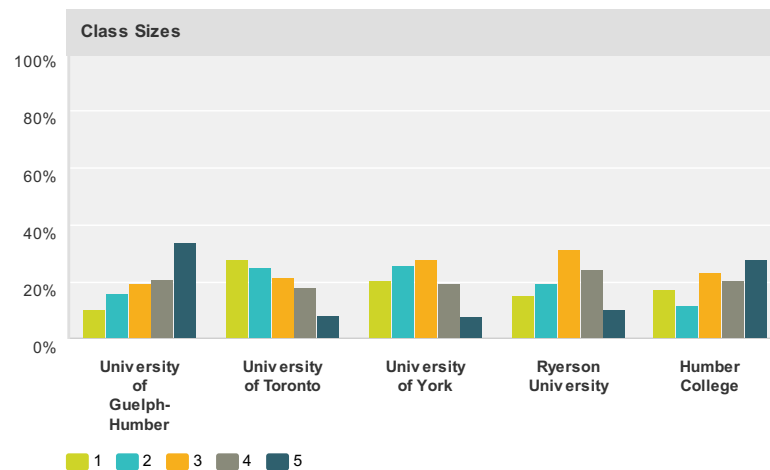
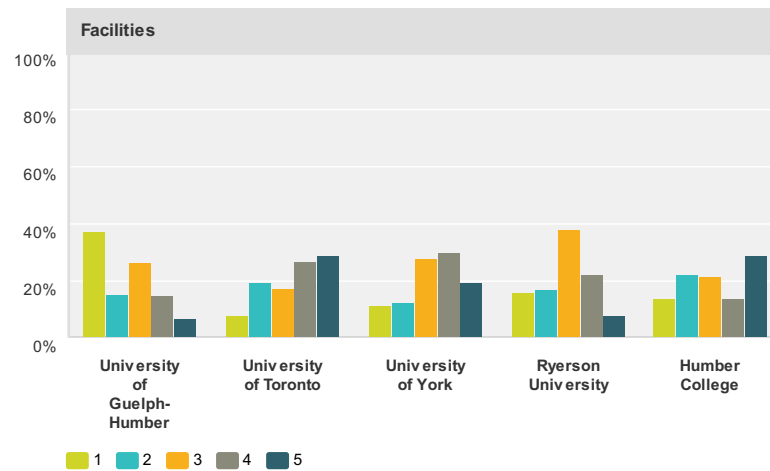
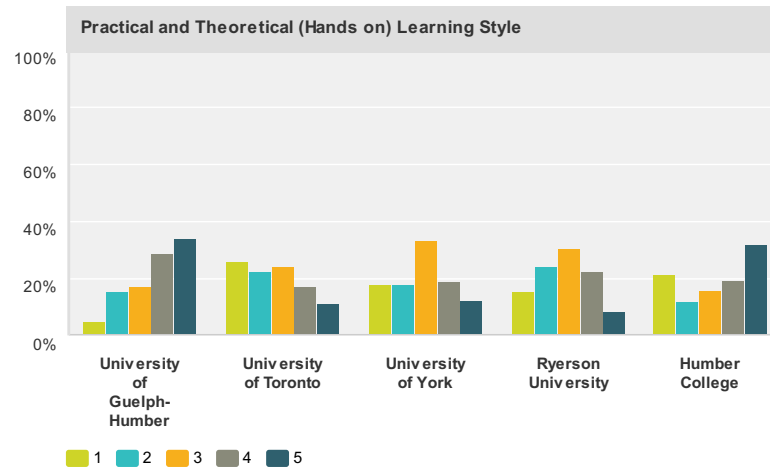


Academic Excellence						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	16.08% 23	29.37% 42	24.48% 35	22.38% 32	7.69% 11	143
University of Toronto	9.09% 13	7.69% 11	18.88% 27	22.38% 32	41.96% 60	143
University of York	9.09% 13	13.29% 19	25.87% 37	27.97% 40	23.78% 34	143
Ryerson University	10.49% 15	18.88% 27	32.17% 46	20.28% 29	18.18% 26	143
Humber College	36.62% 52	19.01% 27	19.72% 28	11.27% 16	13.38% 19	142
Location						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	18.31% 26	30.28% 43	21.83% 31	14.79% 21	14.79% 21	142
University of Toronto	7.75% 11	19.72% 28	18.31% 26	29.58% 42	24.65% 35	142
University of York	18.18% 26	17.48% 25	30.77% 44	15.38% 22	18.18% 26	143
Ryerson University	19.72% 28	9.86% 14	22.54% 32	19.01% 27	28.87% 41	142
Humber College	25.53% 36	21.99% 31	18.44% 26	15.60% 22	18.44% 26	141
Tuition Cost						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	11.35% 16	16.31% 23	25.53% 36	34.75% 49	12.06% 17	141
University of Toronto	32.62% 46	20.57% 29	16.31% 23	16.31% 23	14.18% 20	141
University of York	21.13% 30	26.76% 38	29.58% 42	12.68% 18	9.86% 14	142
Ryerson University	14.18% 20	23.40% 33	31.21% 44	15.60% 22	15.60% 22	141
Humber College	17.86% 25	9.29% 13	15% 21	20% 28	37.86% 53	140
Student Overall Experience						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	14.89% 21	12.06% 17	21.99% 31	34.75% 49	16.31% 23	141
University of Toronto	15.60% 22	21.28% 30	29.08% 41	20.57% 29	13.48% 19	141
University of York	14.08% 20	19.01% 27	24.65% 35	20.42% 29	21.83% 31	142
Ryerson University	18.44% 26	20.57% 29	24.11% 34	21.28% 30	15.60% 22	141
Humber College	18.57% 26	14.29% 20	17.86% 25	21.43% 30	27.86% 39	140

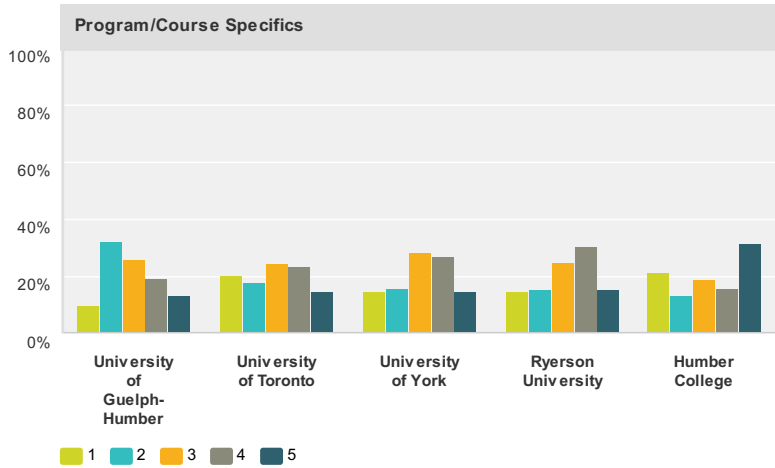
Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q6 Rank these schools on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest 5 the highest) in terms of:

Answered: 145 Skipped: 3



Positioning of Ontario Universities

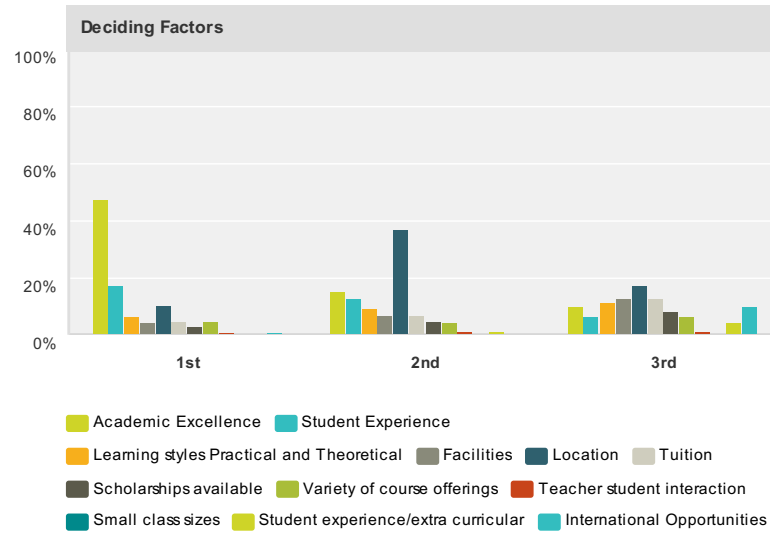


Practical and Theoretical (Hands on) Learning Style						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	4.83% 7	15.17% 22	17.24% 25	28.97% 42	33.79% 49	145
University of Toronto	25.52% 37	22.07% 32	24.14% 35	17.24% 25	11.03% 16	145
University of York	17.93% 26	17.93% 26	33.10% 48	18.62% 27	12.41% 18	145
Ryerson University	15.17% 22	24.14% 35	30.34% 44	22.07% 32	8.28% 12	145
Humber College	21.38% 31	11.72% 17	15.86% 23	19.31% 28	31.72% 46	145
Facilities						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	37.24% 54	15.17% 22	26.21% 38	14.48% 21	6.90% 10	145
University of Toronto	7.59% 11	19.31% 28	17.24% 25	26.90% 39	28.97% 42	145
University of York	11.03% 16	12.41% 18	27.59% 40	29.66% 43	19.31% 28	145
Ryerson University	15.86% 23	16.55% 24	37.93% 55	22.07% 32	7.59% 11	145
Humber College	13.79% 20	22.07% 32	21.38% 31	13.79% 20	28.97% 42	145
Class Sizes						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	10.34% 15	15.86% 23	19.31% 28	20.69% 30	33.79% 49	145
University of Toronto	27.59% 40	24.83% 36	21.38% 31	17.93% 26	8.28% 12	145
University of York	20% 29	25.52% 37	27.59% 40	19.31% 28	7.59% 11	145
Ryerson University	15.17% 22	19.31% 28	31.03% 45	24.14% 35	10.34% 15	145
Humber College	17.24% 25	11.72% 17	23.45% 34	20% 29	27.59% 40	145
Program/Course Specifics						
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
University of Guelph-Humber	9.66% 14	32.41% 47	25.52% 37	19.31% 28	13.10% 19	145
University of Toronto	20% 29	17.93% 26	24.14% 35	23.45% 34	14.48% 21	145
University of York	14.48% 21	15.86% 23	28.28% 41	26.90% 39	14.48% 21	145
Ryerson University	14.48% 21	15.17% 22	24.83% 36	30.34% 44	15.17% 22	145
Humber College	21.38% 31	13.10% 19	18.62% 27	15.86% 23	31.03% 45	145

Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q7 What are/were the top three factors when choosing a School to do your Business Degree.

Answered: 144 Skipped: 4

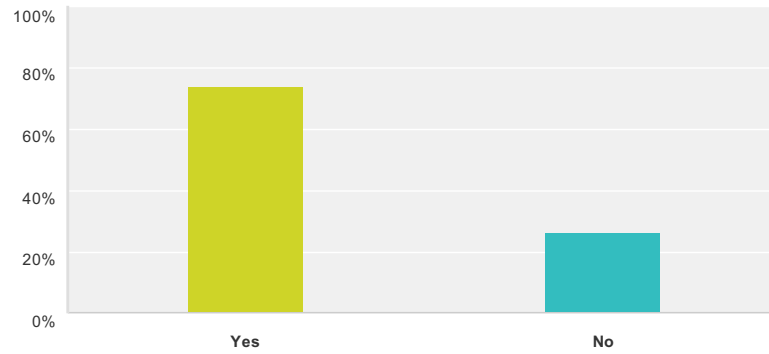


Deciding Factors													
	Academic Excellence	Student Experience	Learning styles Practical and Theoretical	Facilities	Location	Tuition	Scholarships available	Variety of course offerings	Teacher student interaction	Small class sizes	Student experience/extra curricular	International Opportunities	Total
1st	47.22% 68	17.36% 25	6.25% 9	4.17% 6	10.42% 15	4.86% 7	2.78% 4	4.86% 7	0.69% 1	0.69% 1	0% 0	0.69% 1	144
2nd	15.28% 22	12.50% 18	9.03% 13	6.94% 10	36.81% 53	6.94% 10	4.86% 7	4.17% 6	1.39% 2	0.69% 1	1.39% 2	0% 0	144
3rd	9.72% 14	6.25% 9	11.11% 16	12.50% 18	17.36% 25	12.50% 18	8.33% 12	6.25% 9	1.39% 2	0.69% 1	4.17% 6	9.72% 14	144

Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q8 Do you know or have you heard about the business program at the University of Guelph-Humber.

Answered: 144 Skipped: 4

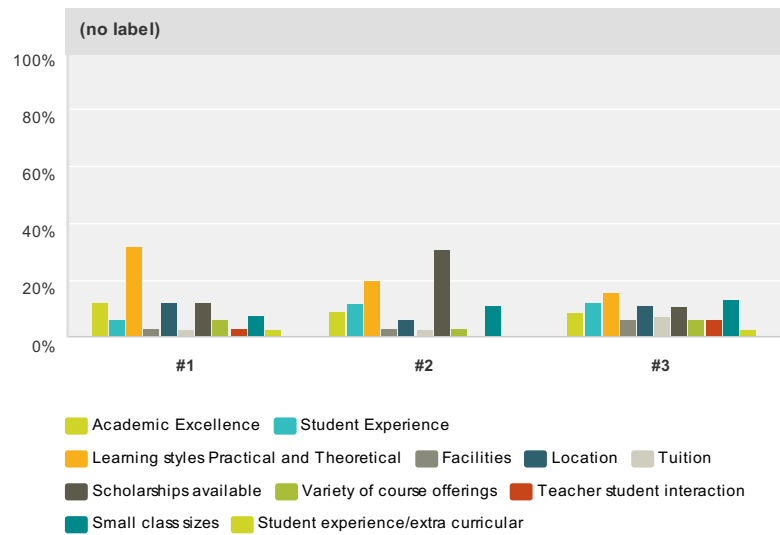


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	73.61%	106
No	26.39%	38
Total		144

Positioning of Ontario Universities

Q9 If yes, what are the Guelph-Humber's best features

Answered: 117 Skipped: 31



(no label)												
	Academic Excellence	Student Experience	Learning styles Practical and Theoretical	Facilities	Location	Tuition	Scholarships available	Variety of course offerings	Teacher student interaction	Small class sizes	Student experience/extra curricular	Total
#1	12.07% 14	6.03% 7	31.90% 37	3.45% 4	12.07% 14	2.59% 3	12.07% 14	6.03% 7	3.45% 4	7.76% 9	2.59% 3	116
#2	9.40% 11	11.97% 14	19.66% 23	3.42% 4	5.98% 7	2.56% 3	30.77% 36	3.42% 4	0.85% 1	11.11% 13	0.85% 1	117
#3	8.77% 10	12.28% 14	15.79% 18	6.14% 7	11.40% 13	7.02% 8	10.53% 12	6.14% 7	6.14% 7	13.16% 15	2.63% 3	114